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Statement submitted by World Population Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

Female condoms: a life-saving alternative

The internationally agreed development goals on gender equality, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS will not be attained if existing simple technologies, such as the female condom, remain out of reach of women and men who need it.

Worldwide there is an enormous unmet need for contraceptives and methods to prevent HIV and Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs). Especially women bear the negative consequences of this unmet need. Around 200 million women worldwide have no access to contraceptives. One third of all the pregnancies are unintended and mostly unwanted. Per year 20 million unsafe abortions are carried out and half a million women die due to complications during delivery. In sub-Saharan Africa 61% of all new HIV infections are among women.

The female condom is the only existing women-initiated barrier prevention method, which provides protection from HIV infection, other STIs and unwanted pregnancy. Studies have shown it is acceptable to users, increases the proportion of protected sex acts, and it is cost-effective when provided in addition to male condoms. Yet most women cannot access them. However, the female condom does not sell itself and needs proper programming. Ensuring that women are able to protect themselves but also that people have the knowledge and skills to say no to sex, to negotiate safer sex, and to enjoy sex, is essential.

Why provide female condoms, when male condoms are more readily available, much cheaper, and provide a comparable level of protection?

- Female condoms are a tool to assist women's empowerment. Women who use female condoms report an increased sense of power for negotiation of safer sex, and a greater sense of control and safety during sex. It will be many years until women have an alternative female-initiated means of protecting themselves.
- Providing both female and male condoms leads to more instances of protected sex and reductions in the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The additive effect of female condoms, providing protection in instances which would not be protected by male condoms, makes them a cost-effective form of HIV prevention.

Conclusion

Female condom use could vastly reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and contribute to women's empowerment.

We call upon all government delegations present to:

- support and advocate for increased accessibility and availability of the female condom,
- increase financial commitments for reproductive health supplies, notably the female condom.

* Issued without formal editing.